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Doing justice

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Doing Justice

Introduction to the Special Issue

Jonathan Wyatt and Marcelo Diversi

Abstract In this article we argue that the contributions to this special issue are examples of the ‘acts of activism’ D. Soyini Madison (2010) speaks of. Such acts, though always late, are necessary and urgent as qualitative researchers seek for their work to *do justice*.

Keywords: *acts of activism, urgency, justice, qualitative*

We are always behind, always late. We are late, ontologically, as the ‘we’ we think we are notice ourselves in the break of the continuous (Manning, 2013), and we are late, historically, as we look back. ‘Moral lateness’, as Mark Freeman (2010, p. 67) argues, brings with it the risk as we consider ‘what happened’ that we may deceive ourselves or, perhaps worse, see our true culpability with the clarity we did not possess at the time. From either perspective, we can never keep up.

This collection, in these senses, is late. The world has moved, is moving; we have moved, are moving. The political events the contributors to this collection engage with dominate the landscape we inhabit: gross apparitions, whose advent some, in some parts of the world, might have struggled to believe at first, rubbing their eyes when they first appeared, are now an undeniable, looming presence, even if shock and incredulity remain. For others, such happenings have always been there and what has changed is they are now being echoed in the privileged West.

But lateness brings with it the invitation of urgency, an urgency that presses upon us, spurring us to respond, to catch up, calling us out of our inertia and despair and demanding, at the very least, that we pay more attention. Those of us from nations and cultures destroyed and reinvented by colonization may have been less surprised by Brexit or Trump’s election in the United States than our colleagues from advantaged segments of Western societies. Many continue to live and labour under authoritarian and populist regimes decades and centuries after independence, even where some nominal versions of democracy exist. Still, we too were surprised by both Brexit and Trump’s election in 2016. We did not think that such a (re)turn to mean-spirited

and exclusionary politics would happen again in the longest-lasting democracies in the world.

Perhaps too many of us took for granted that democracy and unconditional inclusion are natural destinations for human civilization, albeit arduous and slow to reach. The rise of the global right is now challenging such assumptions, hopes, and dreams. But perhaps this contemporary institutionalized turn to exclusion and malevolence can bring more of us together in resistance, love, courage, and collective imagination about how to reconcile, heal, and move forward as one large human and more-than-human family. We think every piece in this collection wrestles with how to move forward with greater care, attention, and compassion, even if the path is hard to see at the moment.

We write this introduction over a year after the initial prompt for this special issue, a call from Jonathan to qualitative researchers gathering for the inaugural European Congress of Qualitative Inquiry in Leuven, Belgium, in February 2017, followed by a similar call from him to those attending the International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry (ICQI) in Urbana-Champaign, Illinois, USA, in May 2017. The May call (the February call updated following the French presidential election) read as follows:

In June 2016, the UK voted, against most expectations, to leave the European Union, following a divisive, threatening, unedifying referendum campaign. In November 2016 the US elected Donald Trump as President, also against expectations and also amidst hate-filled rhetoric. Brexit, the election of Trump, the rise of support for Le Front National in France's presidential election this month, established authoritarian societies such as Putin's Russia, Erdoğan's Turkey and Orbán's Hungary that maintain certain democratic trappings as a convenient front, and more, all speak to the spread of a global right-wing conservative authoritarian political movement.

ICQI delegates are in the thick of the impact of this movement. We have delegates from nations that have already experienced their version of Trump and what this authoritarian turn means for critical inquiry, for the assault on democratic ideals, the war on dissent, attacks on young people, women, minorities, healthcare and the environment, the criminalization of social problems, and the militarization of everyday life. The politics may be local, but the power is global.

What does all this mean for qualitative inquiry? What does this call forth from us? How does this rise of the right affect the way we think and write and carry ourselves within our institutions, amongst our scholarly communities and

in relation to our work? How does it inform how we theorise and produce knowledge? How does it mobilise us? As Rosi Braidotti writes in the wake of Trump's election:

'We need to compose together a plane of agreement about what our shared hopes and aspirations are. We need to agree on what we want to build together as an alternative. Critique and creation work hand-in-hand'. (Braidotti, 2016)

This plenary invites scholars from around the globe to respond to the impact of Trump, Brexit, and the global rise of the right to find ways to articulate this impact and where we go from here.

We will present for no more than 8 minutes each in response to these three questions:

1. What impact is the 'rise of the right' having upon me? Where is it leaving/taking me? What is it evoking?
2. How am I thinking about, or rethinking, (my) inquiry as a consequence?
3. Where do we go from here? What does this community do now?

We will speak in turn, then pause and in the time remaining gather others' thoughts, responses, echoes.

This special issue brings the sets of contributions from both events together (bar one absentee), with the articles drawing from a range of perspectives, backgrounds, experiences, beliefs, disciplines, theoretical positions, and more. Many contributors have expanded and/or revised their papers, each continuing to be prompted (differently) by the three questions contained in the calls. And we were graced with authors who showed us new ways to move forward in hope, always responding to us with kindness and understanding in our many requests for revision, clarification, and elaboration of thought. We finalize this collection more hopeful than when the first calls for papers were made.

Throughout the process of putting this issue together, we, editors and contributors alike, have been aware of our desire for our work to *do justice*. Not with a sense of grandiosity but with a sense of responsibility: to do what we can; to do, perhaps, just a little justice. Justice to our research, to qualitative inquiry, to ourselves, and to the wider import of the political events framing this collection.

We have been aware, too, of the aforementioned sense of urgency, the aspiration to be *on time*. This collection can never be that, but it can feed into, generate, stimulate, fuel our conversations; it can speak from where it is to where we will

become, in a ‘gesture of encounter . . . thinking collectively at its limit’ (Manning, 2016, p. ix) as together we strive towards the im/possibility of being able to look back and know we have neither deceived ourselves nor been culpable, rather know we were active not complacent, that we and others undertook – and continued to undertake, and continued and continued, persistent and relentless – the ‘acts of activism’ (Madison, 2010) that called us.

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About the Authors

Jonathan Wyatt is professor of qualitative inquiry and director of the Centre for Creative-Relational Inquiry at the University of Edinburgh. His current book, *Therapy, Stand-up, and the Gesture of Writing: Towards Creative-Relational Inquiry*, is published by Routledge.

Marcelo Diversi is professor of human development at Washington State University Vancouver, USA. He teaches and writes with the hope that critical inquiry matters enough to help us expand the circle of Us around the globe.